## Melodic Figurations in Khyāl-gāyakī

ANIALI MITTAL

Khyāl-gāyaki today is the most popular form of Hindustani classical vocal music, though it is not so old as the Dhruvapada genre. However, my purpose here is aesthetic, not historical. It is to bring out the most distinctive artistic feature of this particular style of singing. This is why I have chosen to write on those melodic figurations which are commonly known as tānas and which distinguish this form of North Indian music.

I do not wish to suggest, I may add, that tānas are the only distinguishing feature of Khyāl-gāyaki. Barhat is also one such feature. It is a leisurely unfoldment of the individual nature, depth, and aesthetic potential of the rāga chosen. A similar unfoldment is very importantly there also in ālāpa of the Dhruvapada singer. But these two appearances of rāga-vistār (or rāga-elaboration) are by no means identical. In Khyāl-singing, barhat is normally done through melodic phrases which may incorporate words (or the text) of the bandish (or the basic composition), a sprinkling of sargams (singing of note-names) or occasional glides, all of course in meticulous conformity with the grammatical character of the rāga chosen. Now these elements — that is, words and note-names — are not at all used by an ālāpiyā (of the authentic Dhruvapada kind) as he develops the rāga. What is, however, more relevant to the purpose of the present essay is the fact that in Khyāl-singing, when the structure of the sthāyi-antarā complex has been properly established, and when barhat has made the rāga quite manifest, the singer resorts to decorative patterns in the form of tānas of various kinds such as bol-tāna, gamak-tāna, and lively sargams, first at madhya laya, and then at drut pace, especially during the singing of a Chhotā Khyāl.

The intricacy of the varying designs of these tanas depends on the training and personal ability of the individual singer, that is, on his imaginative vitality and voice control. The more pliable the voice, the richer can be the variety of design in tanas; and it is their winsome design which save tanas from appearing as mere *riyaz ke palte*, or set phrases that make for improving practice.

In principle, a tāna is a design that is more or less complete in itself. A riyāz kā paltā, on the other hand, is a mere fragment. Further, whereas a pattern of practice has to be repeated, a tāna (during performance) does not brook reiteration. A tāna should appear decorative to listeners; a riyāz kā paltā only helps the *vocalist*. The grammar of the rāga has of course to be adhered to in either case; but instead of merely indicating the rāga, a tāna has to show what infinite variety of decorative filling the rāga admits of. Consistent tunefulness; a perfect balance of discreteness of constituent notes and continuity of flow; and a look of self-completeness are other essential requirements of a good tāna. Further, few people realize that not merely the inner design and tone, but even the two ends of a tāna deserve the vocalist's attention. One who begins a tāna with a jerk simply to evoke a semblance of vigour — or ends it weakly in a narrow squeal with a view to showing how far he can go

into the tara saptak — only outrages the very basic requirement of music, namely, euphonic appeal.

How the pace, extent, and number of tānas relate to the kind of Khyāl being sung is also noteworthy. In the singing of a Vilambit Khyāl it is enough to sing tānas of varying duration, i.e., from half an āvartana (or round of the rhythm cycle) to one full āvartana, for about five to ten minutes. In a Drut Khyāl recital, on the other hand, the general trend is to sing a variety of tānas of changing duration — their temporal length changing from a quarter of an āvartana to several āvartanas. But whatever be their locus, a Vilambit or a Drut Khyal, melodic figurations should never be overdone. Their singing should always be punctuated with occasional returns to the sthāyi, so that the total recital may appear as a judicious blend of variety and animation with singleness and repose. Nor is sweetness of tone ever to be sacrificed for the sake of sheer hectic pace or intricacy of design. The vocalist has to remember that his essential function is to show not what he can do, but how beautiful his music can be.

In respect of variety, tānas are virtually infinite. Every kind of melodic passage and all structural and textual/syntactical variations are included in tānas which serve to bring out the distinctive aesthetic potential of the rāga being rendered.

The way is now paved to focus attention on the variety of tanas in Khyal-singing, say, as follows:

(a) Kūta Tāna: An assorted arrangement of svaras where there is no regular order of notes, like the following in rāga Jhinjhoti:

Sa Re Sa Dha ma Ga, Pa ma Pa Dha ma Ga Sa Re Sa Sa, Pa Dha ma Pa Ga, Sa Re Ga Sa.

- (b) Chhūṭa kī Tāna: This is a pattern which is punctuated with leaps between svaras or a group of svaras, usually between tetrachords. Sometimes, however, the leaps can even be from one octave to another. Here are two examples of Chhūṭa Tāna:
  - (i) Ga Ga Re Sa, Ni Ni Dha Pa, Ga Ga Re Sa, Ni Ni Dha Pa, Ga Ga Re Sa.
  - (ii) Ga Ga, Ni Ni Ga Ga, Ga Ga Ga Ga Re Sa, Re Re Re Re Re Sa Ni, Ni Ni Ni Ni Ni Dha Pa, ma Ga Re Sa\*.

\*Examples of tānas given in this article (except for the Kūta Tāna in rāga Jhinjhoti, the Chhūta ki Tāna in rāga Hamsadhvani, the Sapāṭa Tana in rāga Puriyā Kalyān, and the Ladanta Tāna in rāga Patdeep) are from *The Musical Heritage of India* (pp. 66–74) by M. R. Gautam, published by Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi. They are reproduced with the author's permission. In the notations, capital letters denote *shuddha* or *tivra* svaras, while the lower case indicates *komal* or flat notes. Dots above svaras indicate that they are in the tāra saptak, the higher octave, whereas a dot below a svara shows that it is in the *mandra saptak*, the lower octave.

Another example of Chhūṭa Tāna (in Rāga Hamsadhvani): Pa Pa Pa Ni Ni Ni Pa Pa Ni Ni Ni Ġa Ġa Ġa Ġa Ġa Ġa Ġa Ġa Re Re Ni Ni Pa Pa Pa Ga Ga Ga Re Sa.

- (c) Gamaka Tāna: This is a melodic passage which generally (but not always) takes the avaroha (descending) course and which consists in repeating the same svara four to six times in bunches of three and two. The tāna is sung in such a way that the note in question looks like a resilient bounce. The tone, here, has to be mellow, yet deep. A sharp tone and a throaty voice go against the proper execution of this tāna. They would make the tāna appear a scratchy repetition, blighting the requisite roundness of svaras. In rāga Malkauns, a Gamaka Tāna will take the following forms:
  - (i) ni ni ni ni ni ni dha dha dha dha dha dha ma ma ma ma ma ma ga ga ga ga ga ga Sa.
  - (ii) ga ga ga Sa Sa ni ni ni dha dha ma ma ma ga ga, Sa.
- (d) Sapāṭa or Shuddha Tāna: In singing this tāna, the āroha-avaroha (ascent-descent) passage of a rāga is taken without a break and at as great a pace as the singer can conveniently manage. It stops only when it has completed itself at the tonic, and not at any earlier point. The range of this tāna is usually between one and one-and-a-half octaves. As a rule, it is not generally sung independently, but as a fitting finale to other tānas which run through a more complex collocation of svaras. Its best exponents are Rampur musicians who actually belong to the Gwalior gharānā. The late Ustad Hafiz Khan of Indore was a masterly singer of this tāna. Ustad Mushtaq Hussain Khan, his eldest son Ishtiaq Hussain Khan, Ustad Nisar Hussain Khan of the Sahaswan gharānā, and Tāna Samrāt Ustad Nasir Ahmed Khan of the Delhi gharānā have been other brilliant singers of this tāna.

Ideally, this tāna requires a light and mellow voice which can glide over the notes as if on roller-bearings, both up and down the octave, without of course bedimming the  $d\bar{a}n\bar{a}$  or individuality of constituent notes. The entire tāna should be uniform in tone and quite without any jerks or *khatkā*. The best way to get this tāna going is to sing the notes in groups of four per  $m\bar{a}tr\bar{a}$ , so as to make for both speed and clarity.

An example in rāga Puriyā Kalyān:

Ni re Ga Ma Dha Ni re Ga re Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga re Sa.

(e) Alankārika and Palte ki tānas: Alankārika tānas follow a definite pattern, but the scheme of arrangement of svaras is complex. It omits intervening notes and produces odd combinations. In spite of this complexity, these tānas duly serve as embellishment. Palte ki Tānas, on the other hand, are not so complex; and, what is more, they build upon both āroha and avaroha.

Two examples of Alankārika Tāna in rāga Toḍi:

- (i) Sa re, Sa ga, re ga, Ma ga, Sa Ma ga re, Sa re ga Ma, re ga, re Ma ga Ma, Pa Ma.
- (ii) Sa re Sa, ga re Sa, Ma ga, Sa ga Ma re, Sa re ga- Ma, re ga re, Ma ga re, dha Ma, re Ma Pa ga, re ga- Ma dha, etc.

## Examples of Palte ki Tāna:

- (i) Sa re, ga re re Sa, re ga Ma ga ga re, ga Ma, Pa Ma- Ma ga, etc.
- (ii) Sa re ga re, re ga Ma ga, ga Ma dha Ma, Ma dha Ni dha, dha Ni Sa Ni, Ni Sa Ni Sa dha Ni Sa Ni, Ma dha Ni dha, ga Ma dha Ma, re ga Ma ga, Sa re ga re, Ni Sa re Sa.
- (f) Zamzamā tāna: This is a relatively light kind of tāna, and is articulated from the middle of the mouth, using the middle portion of the tongue. The use of accents in the tāna is peculiar; the svaras are taken in groups of two, three and four, with a characteristic gentle shake, the next higher svara being just a grace note. The shake is not crisp and heavy, but swinging and rounded, and is preceded and followed by other embellishments. Although the phrases in this tāna are very short, they appear beautiful and articulate only if the successive phrases make a seamless flow. The pace at which this tāna is sung is fairly quick, but it cannot be too fast because its chief feature, zamzamā, is not to be bedimmed. Further, it is mostly used in the Tappā genre of vocal music. Masterly exponents of this tāna have been Ustad Faiyaz Khan and Pandit Bhola Nath Bhatt, Badi Moti Bai (Benares), Rasoolan Bai, Siddheshwari Devi (Benares), Girija Devi (Benares), Pandit Ramuji of Gaya, and his son, Goverdhan Misra.

Examples in Raga Bhairavi follow:

- Pa dha ni, <sup>ni</sup>dha <sup>ni</sup>dha <sup>ni</sup>dha, ni dha pa ma ga ga, <sup>Pa</sup>ma <sup>Pa</sup>ma, <sup>Pa</sup>ma, <sup>ma</sup>ga <sup>ma</sup>ga <sup>ma</sup>ga <sup>ma</sup>ga re sa.
- (ii) Sa, maga maga maga maga, Pama Pama ma, midha midha midha midha dha, sani sani sani sani sani ni, re'Sa re'Sa re'Sa, etc.
- (g) Halaq ki Tāna: This is a tāna which uses the tongue, in the main. A pronounced upand-down movement of the tongue invests this tāna with a swing which resembles the doddering of an old man. It involves an inevitable distortion of intonation, and defies fast singing. Perhaps any tāna can be converted into a Halaq ki Tāna by articulating it mainly with the tongue.
- (h) Jodi or Acharak Tāna: Here the notes are taken in groups of two, three, four, five, etc., their precise number depending on the singer's own ability. Its distinctive and essential feature is fineness of accentuation. Proper articulation of this tāna is best achieved when it is done from the root of the tongue, with the breath amply held in the chest; and when the sound is projected forward towards the lips. This projection helps in achieving the required clarity of accents.

A few examples in Raga Bhairav follow:

- (i) Sa Sa re re. Ga Ga ma ma.
- (ii) Sa Sa Sa, re re re. Ga Ga Ga Ga, ma ma ma.
- (iii) Sa Sa Sa Sa, re re re re, Ga Ga Ga Ga, ma ma ma ma.
- (iv) Sa Sa, Sa Sa Sa, re re, re re re, Ga Ga Ga, ma ma, ma ma ma.
- (v) Sa Sa Sa, Sa Sa, re re re, re re re, Ga Ga, Ga Ga Ga, Ga Ga Ga, ma ma ma, ma ma ma. Along with the patterns given earlier, this particular tana can be sung in the way of metric accents (chhanda) of jatis like Tisra, Khanda, Misra and Chatusra.

Another noteworthy point here is the order of accenting to be followed in singing the various jatis of five, six, and seven notes. Singing in tufts of five notes would be much easier if the total number is split up into two and three, with an accent on the first and third notes; on the first and fourth notes, if singing is done in bunches of six notes; and on the first, fourth, and sixth notes where the svaras are put together in groups of seven. Such an arrangement will project both the accents and chhanda quite clearly. The accents will produce a cross-rhythm against the beats of the tāla and make for very interesting, and at times quite intricate, rhythmic patterns along with the run of the Tablā rhythm. Arrival at the sama is here quite striking, partly because it comes at the end of a deftly elongated pattern. Some singers of the Agra and Patiala gharānās, and some representatives of Ustad Alladia Khan's school — namely, Nivruttibua Sarnaik, Gajananrao Joshi and Mallikarjun Mansur — have availed of this artistic device with consummate effect. Ram Marathe of Bombay also sings such tānas with great ability and fineness.

(i) Khatkā tāna: The word khatkā in Hindi means a tap or knock; hence this tāna is to be rendered in such a way that the same note, when intoned repeatedly, appears not only discrete, but a little emphatic. Sung in a weighty (or wazandār) tone, this tāna has usually three or four segments. Articulation here arises from the root of the tongue, and the breath — stored up amply in the chest — is exhaled in spurts, to produce the different parts of the tāna. Each part is so accented — a little jerkily — that its distinctness from other parts is thrown into relief. It is sung as a variant, just once or twice before the vocalist switches over to other unsegmented tānas. What is more, it has to be sung at as fast a pace as one is capable of.

Some examples in raga Todi follow:

- (i) Sa re ga, re ga, -re Sa Sa, Ma dha Ni-, dha Ni-, dha Pa Pa, Sa re ga-, re ga-, re ga-, re Sa Sa, dha Ni-, dha Ni-, dha Pa Pa, re ga-, re ga Ma-, ga re ga-, re Sa Sa.
- (ii) Ma dha-, Ma dha-, Ma dha Ni-, Ni dha dha Pa Pa Ma, ga Ma ga Ma-, ga Ma dha-, dha Ma ga ga re, re ga re ga-, re ga ga-, Ma ga ga re Sa Sa.
- (iii) Sa re-, Sa re ga-, re ga-, re ga Ma-, ga Ma-, ga Ma dha-, Ma dha-, ga Ma- re ga-, re Sa Sa-.
- (j) Ihaṭkā Tāna: The word jhaṭkā means jolt or jerk. Accordingly, though it begins quite slowly, with a sudden jolt this tāna accelerates its pace, makes a quick twist, and accomplishes a descent. The late Ustāds Faiyaz Khan and Sharafat Hussain Khan have been masterly singers of this tāna. The tāna can be made more complex with the use of words.

Examples in rāga Desi:

- (i) ni-Sa Re ma-Pa-, Re ma, Re ma Pa ma ga re Sa re ni Sa
- (ii) Re- ma- Pa- ni Sa-, Pa- ni- Pa ni Sa Re Sa Re Sa- Pa Dha ma Pa Re- ga Sa- Re ni Sa
- (k) Gitkiri Tāna: This tāna is sung best with a clear, pure ākāra (河) and is articulated with a saturated monotone. The best exponents of this tāna belong to Ustad Alladia Khan's school. It is their speciality, and they sing an incredible variety of this tāna relating it variously

to the run of rhythm. What justifies the naming of this tāna is a perceptible quiver which distinguishes it and which calls for a very quick pace. Masterly singers of this tāna include Kesarbai Kerkar, Moghubai Kurdikar, Mallikarjun Mansur, Nivruttibua Sarnaik, and Vamanrao Sadolikar.

Examples in raga Lalita Gauri:

- (i) Ni re Ni re, re Ga re Ga, Ga Ma Ga Ma, re Ga re ga, re Sa Sa.
- (ii) Ga ma ga ma, ga Ma ga Ma, re Ga re Ga, re Sa Sa, Ma dha Ma Ni Ma re, Ma Ni Ma dha, ga ma ga Ma, ma Ma ga ma, re ga re ga, re Sa Sa.
- (l) Ulat-palat Tāna: This tāna is so called because each figure of it comprises both āroha and avaroha or vice versa. It is difficult to sing the tāna, for it calls for great control in switching from one direction to its reverse, and precision of intonation.

Two examples in rāga Brindābani Sārang:

- (i) Ņi Sa ma Re, Sa re Pa ma, Re ma ni Pa, ma Pa Sa Ni, Pa Ni Re Sa ma Re Ni Sa, Re Sa Pa ni, Sa ni ma Pa, ni Pa Re ma, Pa ma Sa Re, ma Re Ni Sa
- (ii) Sa Re Pa ma Re Sa, Re ma ni Pa ma Re, ma Pa Sa ni Pa ma, etc.
- (m) Miśra Tāna: This tāna is a mixture of two or more varieties of the tānas mentioned above, but the Sapāt (or straight) Tāna has to be dominant here. The aptness and intricacy of blending the different kinds of tānas naturally depends on the musician's own calibre.

An example in raga Jaunpuri:

ni Sa Re ma Re ma Re Pa ma Re dha Pa Pa dha Pa ni dha Pa Sa ni dha Re Sa Re ni dha pa ma ga Re Sa-

(n) Vakra Tāna: The word 'vakra' means crooked, oblique — not straight. So the tāna which bears this name does not follow any pre-fixed order. Everything here depends on the vocalist's ability to improvise and innovate; and here, again, the pace has to be as fast as possible.

An example in rāga Alhaiyā Bilāwal:

Sa Sa Re Re Ga Sa Re ma Re Ga Pa Dha Ga Pa Ga Pa Dha Pa Dha ni Pa ni ni Pa Dha ma Dha Dha Pa ma Ga Re Re Ga Pa ma Ga Re Sa.

(o) Ladanta Tāna: The word 'ladanta' means confrontation or conflict. So a Ladanta Tāna is one the different parts of which appear quite opposed to each other in respect of both aesthetic pace and jāti of laya.

An example in raga Behag:

Ni Sa Ga ma Pa ma Ga Re Sa Sa Sa Ga Ga Pa Pa Ga ma Ga ma Pa Pa Pa ma Pa Ni Pa Pa Ni Sa Ga-Ga ma Pa Ni Ni Sa Ga Ga ma Pa Ga ma Pa Ni Pa Ni Sa Ga Re Sa.

An example in raga Patdeep:

Sa ga ma Pa ma ga Re Sa, ma ga ma Pa ma ga Re Sa, Pa ma Pa ga ma ga ma Pa, Pa ma Pa ga ma ga Re Sa, Pa Dha ma Pa Ni Sa Pa ni Dha Pa ma Pa ma ga Re Sa. (p) Jabdey ki Tāna: The word 'jabdā' means jaw. This tāna is produced by a fluent upand-down movement of the jaw. It cannot be sung at a fast pace, and is generally regarded as a mark of poor training and voice culture.

## General Remarks

In respect of all these tanas, two points are noteworthy. First, they all provide varying passages across different notes, and no mere abidance at a single note. So they highlight the occurrent or dynamic aspect of music. Second, though the more orderly and well-designed tanas admit of representation in terms of linear diagrams, they do not aim at representing objects or expressing emotions. Their purpose is essentially decorative, though their design can sometimes be too intricate to appear an embellishment.

Yet good design is not the only requirement here. Fidelity to *sur* and rāga; and in the case of really pacy tānas, a skilful balancing of fluency with distinctness of the individual notes that they build upon, an absence of constriction or distortion of ākāra or loss of tonal colour, are also very necessary. Be that as it may, it is essentially to its variety of tānas that the Khyāl form of singing owes its distinctive appeal; and this is also what distinguishes the Khyāl form from Dhruvapada-singing most clearly. I may add that whereas ālāpa and Dhruvapada are certainly to be acclaimed for their depth and dignity, and even (at times) for their elevating quality, one must admit that sheer decorativeness is also a potent source of aesthetic appeal. See, here, the following words of George Santayana:

That the ornate may be very beautiful, that in fact what is to be beautiful needs to be somehow rich, is a fact of experience. Decoration, by stimulating the senses, not only brings a primary satisfaction with it, independent of any that may supervene, but it furnishes an element of effect which no higher beauty can ever render unwelcome or inappropriate, since any higher beauty, in moving the mind, must give it a certain sensuous and emotional colouring. Decoration is accordingly an independent art...

[The Life of Reason, Constable & Co., London, 1954, p. 351; italics added.]

At this point, however, a question may be put. Does Khyāl-gāyakī justify the view that decoration may be regarded as an *independent* art? To this I may give the following piecemeal answer:

To begin with, it is a fact of experience that the decorative element in Khyāl-singing has an intrinsic, if not independent, appeal. No one who has heard the music of the unforgettable Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan or of my own mentor, Tāna Samrāt Ustad Nasir Ahmed Khan of the Delhi gharānā, can deny what I have just said. Further, because tānas are, in principle, infinite in number even within the ambit of the same rāga, they may well be said to meet the primary requirement of beauty, that is, unity in variety. What is more, because (as pointed out earlier) a good Khyāl tāna is a fine blend of continuity of flow and discreteness of notes that it covers, it may also be taken to exemplify what aestheticians like Susanne K. Langer have spoken of as the articulate form of music.

Yet, I hasten to point out, in so far as the *tānas* of a Khyāl-singer owe their beauty at least partly to their contrast with the steadfast character of sthāyi, decorativeness as seen in Khyāl-singing cannot be said to be an *independent* art. No complete recital is made up of tānas

alone. Positively, however, it is important to list the main features which make for the beauty and aesthetic rightness of a tana, in addition to the ones to which I have already referred:

A tana should complete itself either at the sama with split-second accuracy, or a little before that point in the sthayi where the amad—or the manifestly designed approach to the sama (or the central beat) of the tala—begins. Even generally, it is desirable that a tana may all along bear an identifiable relation to aesthetic pace as marked by the drummer.

In so far as the up-and-down or āroha-avaroha contour of the melodic flow is most easily noticed even by *kanrasiyās*, as distinguished from *rasikas*, it would secure wider appeal for the singing if simple ascent-descent tānas are not quite neglected for the sake of showing off one's virtuosity in executing tānas which are involute or otherwise intricate. It is important to remember that a tāna has to appear *decorative itself*, *instead of serving as an index of the singer's virtuosity*.

Further, just as our everyday talk becomes meaningful when we put due emphasis on those words the meaning of which we wish to project, in the same way a decorative pattern may gain in articulateness if some of its svarās are accented and others allowed to flow evenly. A tāna can also avail of what may be called the principle of decorative relief. What I hereby mean is that one easy way to make a tāna gain in inner variety, and so in articulateness of melodic filling, is to punctuate the run of its form with some alankāras or formal graces such as suta, meend and gamak, but always in such a way that they may not appear to inhibit the flow. Skilful regulation of laya or aesthetic pace can also add to the appeal of a tāna. Pace in music, we may note, is not merely the speed at which we cover different svaras, but also the measured duration of abidance at individual svaras.

Finally, though the essential function of a tana is to make for a decorative look, a touch of expressiveness can also be imparted to it through an adroit waxing and waning of akara. This is, to my mind, perhaps the only way to evoke a suggestion of a rise and subsidence of feeling in vocal music, quite without the aid of words.